

## **A Guitar Song by theamiableanachronism**

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**Summary:** El discovers Mike used to play guitar and Mike suddenly decides he needs to start playing again.

## A Guitar Song

"What's that?"

"What's what?"

El pointed to the guitar leaning against the wall inside Mike's closet. They were supposed to be looking for the comic book that would settle the argument between Dustin and Lucas that was still going on down in the basement, but the guitar had caught El's eye, with its shiny wood reflecting the rays of sunlight coming through Mike's bedroom window, and the comic-hunting was a forgotten venture.

"Oh." Mike said, craning his neck to look into the closet. "That's my guitar."

"You play guitar?" El asked, turning away from the guitar to smile at him, impressed.

He shrugged. "Yeah. Mom made me take lessons a while ago and it was actually kind of fun. I'm not very good, though," he finished quickly, trying and failing to hide the look of embarrassment that clouded his face. El pursed her lips and crawled into the closet. She emerged a moment later with the guitar, clambered to her knees, and held it out to Mike.

"Can you play something?"

"What, now?" he asked incredulously.

"Please?"

Mike sighed. She had to say "please" with that quiet smile. "Okay," he said, defeated without having even put up a fight. "But I'm not that good!" he protested even as he wrapped his fingers around the neck.

Either El didn't hear him as she sat back down next to her pile of comic books or she was ignoring him. From the determined set of her jaw, he guessed it was the latter.

He sighed. One of the easiest songs he'd learned had been "Horse with

No Name". It was also one of the songs he actually remembered, so he decided to play that one.

At first, El watched his hands, fascinated as they shifted across and over the strings, but as usual, her eyes ended up straying to his face. He was frowning, deep in concentration, wincing every few seconds when he paused to rearrange his fingers around the handle. She sighed inwardly, wishing he didn't look so upset while he was playing such nice music. Jonathan talked about guitars all the time when he played music for her from his treasured mixtapes, but none of it sounded like this. Jonathan's was loud and pounding and made her heart beat faster. Mike's was quiet and warm and. . . comforting (although her heart was still pounding a little faster than normal).

Mike was cringing inwardly every time he had to pause after a chord. And that was after every chord. It had been a while since he'd played and it definitely showed, but he made it through the song and finally looked up from the guitar into El's brown eyes. It was something he usually tried (unsuccessfully) to avoid doing, especially when they were crinkled up in a sweet smile like they were right now, just because every time he did, his head swam and his mind became a complete blank.

"Pretty bad, huh?" he said, taking a deep breath to try and clear the dizziness.

She recoiled, looking annoyed, and shook her head.

"It wasn't bad. It was very nice."

He felt his face warm up. "Thanks," he mumbled, looking down before shyly smiling up at her.

"What song was that?"

"Oh, um, it's 'Horse with No Name'. I learned it a while ago. A long while ago," he finished under his breath.

She nodded understandingly. "Can you play another one?"

"Another song?" he asked, raising his eyebrows in surprise. After that, she wanted to hear another one? He chuckled as she nodded eagerly.

"Sure," he grinned, trying to shake off the urge to drop the guitar and just hug her. He racked his brain for something else to play, but his mind had become a complete blank. Again.

The bedroom door opened with a soft click that might as well have been an atomic bomb exploding: Mike and El both jumped nearly a foot in the air, shocking Will and making him take a step back.

"Whoa, sorry guys," he chuckled as his eyes landed on the guitar. "Hey, I thought you guys were looking for the comic book."

"We were," Mike said quickly, leaping to his feet and leaning the guitar against the bed. He rifled through the forgotten pile of comic books and after a moment, pulled out a comic with a bright yellow cover. "Got it!" he announced triumphantly, walking to the door. "You coming, El?" he asked, turning back to face her.

El glanced sadly at the guitar but shrugged and nodded as she stood up.

"You guys better hurry; they're going to tear each other apart down there," Will said with a half-amused, half-exasperated shake of his head.

As they followed Will down the stairs, El whispered to Mike, "Can you play the guitar again sometime, Mike?" She heard the smile in his voice before she saw it. "Yeah. Sure, El."

The sometime didn't come for several weeks. There was never a right time to ask and El had noticed the way Mike had practically thrown the guitar aside when Will came into the room. She didn't want to embarrass him, even though she really wanted to hear him play again. It didn't matter if she didn't know the song; she felt happy and comfortable listening to the sound of his guitar. It also meant she got to spend time with Mike, and that always made her feel happy.

But then one night, after dinner at Mike's house, Mike grabbed her hand and led her down to the basement. He let go of her hand and crossed the room to the couch, where the guitar lay waiting. He lifted it up and held it nervously in his hands. "Um, so there's this song that I've been practicing," he started hesitantly before the words started to

tumble out of him. "You said you wanted me to play again sometime and I know that was a really long time ago and I'm sorry about that, but I just wanted it to be good, so I've been working on it and practicing and I don't know if you know the song, but it reminds me of you and-" He stopped and started blushing. She waited for him to go on, searching his face, but he didn't say anything more and just took a deep breath as he sat down on the couch, resting the guitar on his knee. He looked up at her. "Um, it starts like this."

He started to pluck the strings the way he'd been practicing every day for the last three weeks. He'd gone through the song over and over again until the tips of his fingers were burning and sore and his arms were cramped.

Apparently he'd been successful because suddenly El gasped. "Here Comes the Sun!"

He looked up, a surprised smile filling his face as she sat down as close to him as the guitar would allow, staring in awe at both him and the guitar. "Oh, you know it!" he said. She nodded happily and started tapping her feet and bobbing her head. He smiled and returned his attention to the guitar; if he looked at her much longer, he was going to forget the chords.

El couldn't stop smiling: he was playing her song. She'd first heard it three weeks ago on the radio while driving to the grocery store with Jonathan. Once they got home, Jonathan had shown her the album with the song on it and she'd spent the next three days listening to it over and over again. On the fourth day, he gave her a tape of the song and she'd listened to it every day since. She would never tell anyone, but its bright and happy sound reminded her of Mike. She blushed at the thought and started to sing along. It didn't sound exactly like her tape, but that was all right. There were more pauses and sometimes Mike slowed down in different places, but it was still her song. She smiled and kept singing, closing her eyes.

But then one of the pauses didn't end. She opened her eyes and looked curiously at Mike. He'd stopped playing and was staring at her, wearing a soft, lopsided smile that made her chest feel tight.

A hesitant giggle escaped her. "Why did you stop?"

"Hmm?"

"You stopped playing.

Mike turned a deep shade of red. "S-sorry," he stammered, fumbling as he started playing again.

"It's okay," she said quietly, catching his eye and smiling. He relaxed and smiled back, looking fondly into her eyes and although she was sitting, she felt like she was actually floating. She looked down at the floor, not because she wanted to look away, but because looking at him made her feel like she'd just run several miles without stopping. Not to mention, she already had a hard enough time thinking of the right words to say and when she looked at him, the few words she had melted away, frustrating her to no end.

The longer he looked at El, the less Mike thought about guitar and more about how he'd felt just before he'd kissed her in the cafeteria over a year ago, so he quickly turned his attention back to the guitar. He couldn't stop smiling with what he knew was probably the stupidest grin, so he didn't. El started singing again in her quiet warm voice. He took a deep steadying breath that didn't end up helping him at all because right after he did, he caught El's eye and she grinned as she sang. He was reminded for the hundredth time that minute why he chose this song to play for her: her smile lit up the entire room just like the sun that had gone down hours ago, but honestly, it didn't matter that it had gone down: El was brighter anyway.